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The principles on which a Preacher of the Gospel should
condemn sin : with some reference to existing evils.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT THE ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. ROBERT B. HALL,

OVER THE THIRD

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN PLYMOUTH,

AUGUST 23, 1837.

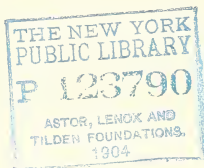
BY REV. G. W. BLAGDEN,

Pastor of Old South Church, Boston.

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Plymouth, August 24, 1837.

REV. AND DEAR SIR,

The Committee of Arrangements tender to you the thanks of the Third Church and Society in Plymouth, for your highly interesting and appropriate discourse, delivered at the ordination of Mr. R. B. Hall, on the 23d inst., and solicit a copy for publication.

With sentiments of great respect and esteem, we are, Sir,

Your Obedient Servants,

| | | |
|----------------------|---|-------------------|
| JOSIAH ROBBINS, | } | <i>Committee.</i> |
| ASA THOMAS, | | |
| FREEMAN BARTLETT, | | |
| HARVEY WESTON, | | |
| ELEAZER S. BARTLETT, | | |
| SAMUEL BRADFORD, | | |

Rev. G. W. Blagden.

Boston, Sept. 26, 1837.

To the Committee of the Third Congregational Church and Society in Plymouth:—

GENTLEMEN,

A copy of my late sermon is cheerfully submitted to your disposal.

Affectionately yours in Christ,

G. W. BLAGDEN.

SERMON.

ISAIAH lviii, 1.

*Cry aloud! spare not! Lift up thy voice like a trumpet!
And show my people their transgression, and the house of
Jacob their sin.*

I BELIEVE it may be truly said, that means of grace, when perverted, become prejudicial in proportion to their value. In conformity with this sentiment, the priesthood are ever represented, in the Bible, as a great blessing, or a great curse. They are the former, when they faithfully proclaim the truth; and the latter when, through fear or favor, they withhold it; or, when eschewing it, they propagate error. An influential part is ever assigned them, therefore, in promoting alike the temporal and spiritual welfare, or ruin of states. A vigilant eye is kept on their conduct.

The greatest blessings are promised to them, if faithful; the most awful curses are pronounced against them, if false to their trust. Mingled with these blessings and curses, there are also the most encouraging exhortations, to those in any degree faithful, to continue steadfast and unmovable in their momentous work. The text is an exhortation of this kind. The prophet was required by God to declare to the Jews, the hypocrisy of their pretended fasts, because in observing them, they exhibited the form of godliness, without its power. They fasted for strife and debate, and smote with the fist of wickedness, instead of loosening its bands, undoing the heavy burdens, letting the oppressed go free, and breaking every yoke. To animate His servants in urging home on their consciences, this their iniquity, Jehovah exhorted him to cry aloud, and spare not, but lift up his voice like a trumpet, and show His people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sin. Thus virtually assuring him, that he need not be afraid firmly to proclaim His message, for God would be with him and support him, as subsequently, God in Christ promised His disciples to be with them always, even unto the end of the world. The text then, may be

considered, as enjoining a faithful boldness on every preacher of truth in reproofing sin. And it is to the means and manner of doing this duty, together with some appropriate motives for its faithful performance, that your attention is asked, in this discourse.

I have selected this subject as peculiarly appropriate to the present occasion, and the present times. It is, probably, well known to all of you, that much is said, at this day, both privately and publicly, concerning the comparative faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the clergy, in this respect. Not only many public prints in our own land, but travellers and journalists from other countries, have spoken, very freely and fully, on this topic. In some instances, even the clergy, themselves, have strongly and publicly blamed their brethren, as time-serving, and recreant to this part of their duty. Nor can it be reasonably doubted or denied, that we are peculiarly exposed to the temptation, either of reproofing iniquity in a wrong spirit, or of failing to condemn it with that firmness and energy demanded of us by God.

Under such circumstances, it becomes a very interesting and important duty,—and one especially appropriate to the ordination of a young Minis-

ter of the Gospel,—to inquire what directions are given in the Bible, to guide the preacher of the cross in exposing and reproofing sin. I may also add, that such a topic is well suited to the place in which we meet, where, amid the graves of those who encountered a weary pilgrimage of sea and land, amid storms and savages, for conscience sake, we may,—

“Snatch from the ashes of our sires,
The embers of their former fires,—”

and feed the flame of our own zeal!

I. It will be my first object, then, to exhibit the instructions given in the Word of God to guide a preacher in exposing and reproofing sin. In endeavoring to do this, I am far from assuming infallibility, or pretending to entire freedom from all undue bias of mind, arising from the deceitfulness of my heart, or the feebleness of my understanding. It will be my single aim to show clearly that which guides my own conscience, in the performance of my own duty, with my present degree of light. Hoping, that if I succeed in doing this, I may afford some assistance to others, in forming their own conclusions.

The duty enjoined in the text clearly suggests the standard to direct in its performance. The ambassador of God is to show his people their sin. But sin is the transgression of the law. It is therefore to the law we are to resort, as the perfect and immutable standard, by which it is to be exposed and condemned. It is to the law of *God*, with its rewards and punishments, addressing itself to the hopes and fears of accountable free-agents, possessed of reason, conscience, and will, rendering them able to obey it, that we are to appeal whenever we would faithfully show men their transgressions. This is to be, to the preacher, what the lantern was to the Grecian philosopher, a light, ever to be borne with him, by which to distinguish the true characters of men. The more we examine it, the more admirably will it be found adapted to this purpose. It is perfect, converting the soul; sure, making wise the simple; right, rejoicing the heart; pure, enlightening the eyes.

But let us, to some extent, analyze this standard, that we may the more distinctly see its adaptation to the end proposed. It is first formally revealed to us in the ten commandments. These we are to maintain and enforce in convicting men

of sin. They are entirely efficacious for this purpose, being very comprehensive ; so that I think, it may be safely said, we cannot contemplate a single crime mentioned in the scriptures, which will not be seen to be an infraction of one or more of their specifications. Nor can we notice a single moral evil existing in human society, which cannot be shown to be such, because it involves the transgression of some one or other of them. These, then, we are to assert and urge, whenever we see them broken. Obeying each of them, while we thus urge them, as a sufficient guarantee against our reproving sin, in a wrong spirit. We are to assert them thus without fear or favor. We need not shrink from doing so, through any dread of consequences. They are the requirements of God, who knows all the relations of things, and has commanded these precepts to be kept, under every variety of circumstance, by every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.

All the narratives of scripture are little else than illustrations of the happiness of obeying, and the misery of transgressing these precepts. Search the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ; read those of Joseph, Saul, Jonathan, or David ; con the history of Israel, the chosen race, from

the night of the first passover, through their wanderings in the wilderness, to the promised land; read the dealings of God with them there, with all the exhortations, warnings, and predicted woes of their prophets; and it will be found, if I mistake not, that a breach of some one or other of the ten commandments will comprehend all forms of iniquity; while obedience to them will fulfil all righteousness. The New Testament presents and urges them with equal force as the great standard of human conduct. Our Savior repeatedly appealed to them as such. He died to magnify and make them honorable. He affirmed that Heaven and earth might pass away, but one jot or one tittle of them should never pass away, till all was fulfilled.

There is an interesting view of the adaptation of the commandments to expose and reprove sin presented by the apostle Paul. He fastened his attention only on the tenth precept of the decalogue; and affirmed that he had not known lust unless the commandment had said, "Thou shalt not covet." He here evidently considered the term lust as comprehending the inordinate desire of any object, whether property, praise, or persons. He doubtless regarded the frequency with

which his soul had been filled with such desires,—the circumstances of aggravation under which it had been thus filled, arising from the fact that God had been continually presented to his mind as his only satisfying portion,—and the other transgressions necessarily connected with such desires, and flowing from them. These considerations while he compared himself with only this single, tenth, portion of the decalogue, sufficiently convicted him of sin; and might well lead him to exclaim, “I was alive without the law once, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died.” Thus did this one precept convict the apostle, and teach him that by the deeds of the law he could not be justified. Much more would each of the other precepts have urged home on his soul a similar charge, and left him what he declared himself to be, in common with all others, dead in trespasses and sins!

It is the same with ourselves. What one of us can faithfully compare his own character with this one commandment, without feeling and acknowledging that he has coveted; that he has cherished, and in most cases, perhaps, striven to indulge desires after objects loved more than a holy and perfect God, and therefore inordinate

and sinful desires; and, when to this, he adds each of the other precepts of the Divine law, fairly and comprehensively considered, will he not find, that under each, the sentence of guilty must be pronounced by conscience? And may he not say, that judged thus by each specification of duty made by this sacred and eternal standard, every mouth must be stopped, and all the world become guilty before God? In the light of these precepts, each one of us, if he acted in obedience to the dictates of reason and conscience, must prostrate himself, like the publican, in the dust, and not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven;—but smite upon his breast, and cry, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!”

The preacher, then, is to urge home on the consciences of men, and keep ever present to his own, as the great means of reproofing sin, the ten commandments of the moral law. These, faithfully explained and enforced, will comprehend and condemn all the forms of iniquity ever perpetrated by man.

But in considering the purity of a law, and its efficacy as a means of detecting iniquity, we may often learn more of its power, by examining its leading principle, than by considering its distinct

precepts. This is the case with the law of God. It builds true obedience to all its precepts on one great, fundamental principle ;—supreme love to the perfect Jehovah. The greatest of all the commandments,—that from which the second great precept flows,—and on which all others hang, is, —“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.” A principle flowing directly from this is, that no one of the others can be truly kept, while this is broken. “Whoso keepeth the whole law, and yet offendeth in one point, he is guilty of all.” It is not meant by this, that whosoever has stolen is therefore guilty of murder ; or, that whosoever may have taken the name of God in vain, has therefore stolen. But it is meant to assert, that whenever any one commits a single sin, he exalts, in that act, an object in his soul’s affections, which he loves more than God ; supreme love to whom is the only motive of true obedience ;—so that, though any other, and all the other commandments be externally obeyed, they are not kept from a right motive, nor with right feelings. The great principle on which obedience to all the other precepts hangs is destroyed. A

dragon is erected in the soul! And, though the transgressor gives all his goods to feed the poor, and his body to be burned, it can profit him nothing. He is as a sounding brass, and a tinkling cymbal! Though he keeps the whole law beside, yet offending in that one point, he does not, he cannot love God supremely. He loves that sin, whatever it may be, more than he loves Jehovah! That first, great command, on which all the others hang, is broken! The key-stone is removed from the perfect arch, and the fair fabric of his obedience totters to its fall!

It is not maintained that such an one would not be a still more heinous transgressor, if he literally broke all the other commandments, as well as this one. More guilty he, then, undoubtedly would be. Yet, still he should remember, that not one of the others can ever be rightly and acceptably observed, in the sight of a pure and holy God, while this one is broken. His motive is, then, wrong in all of them. He may make long prayers. He may pay tithes of mint, anise, and cummin. He may thank God that he is not as other men, extortioners, or adulterers. But, after all, though he keeps the whole law, and yet offends in one point, he is guilty of all; because,

that supreme love to God, on which the whole decalogue hangs, is alien from his heart;—and in the midst of all his fair show of an external obedience, he is without God in the world. He is an idolater in the temple of Jehovah. He may draw near to Him with the mouth;—he may honor Him with the lip;—but his heart is far from Him!

With this solemn and important truth, then, in mind, let us revert to the fact already considered. Let us recollect that under each of the specifications of the Divine law, every man would, probably, on an honest examination of his life, prove guilty of sin, in times and ways innumerable, and how clearly are the precepts and principle of this law adapted, on the lips of the faithful preacher, to convict of sin! Every time we sin, and just so long as we sin, in any one point, we are practically guilty of all. God is then dethroned in our hearts; and the great principle of love to Him, by which all heaven is bound to His throne, is broken! May not each one of *us* well exclaim then, even in the house of God to-day,—“God be merciful to me a sinner!” Does not sin by the commandment thus become exceeding sinful?—Loving any object more than God, I sin, at this moment,

while I speak, as His ambassador, to you! Doing this, you sin, as you listen to me! All of us, while this continues to be the case, practically prostrate His whole law, and “it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting!”—Let then, the preacher of righteousness faithfully proclaim this law, and it shall deeply convict every one of sin.

There is one other principle claiming our notice, before leaving this part of the subject. It is the second great commandment mentioned by Christ:—“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” By our neighbor, as the term was explained by the Redeemer in the interesting parable of the good Samaritan, is meant not only one dwelling near us, in the place of our abode,—though this is included in the idea, but man becomes our neighbor as we become acquainted with his natural and moral wants, and possess any ability to supply them. It was enough for the good Samaritan to know that a suffering fellow creature needed his aid, and with a benevolent sympathy he ran to his relief, doing for it, what he could.

To love our neighbor, thus defined, as ourselves, implies, that as we are accountable free-agents under the government of God, and seek His glory and our happiness in obeying Him, abhorring our

characters and repenting in dust and ashes when we have sinned,—and striving, through grace strengthening us, to become increasingly conformed to His will;—so we labor as we have ability, to place and preserve our fellow men, as free-agents, in the most favorable circumstances for glorifying God, and promoting their own happiness, in His service; dreading them and their influence, as we abhor ourselves when sinful! yet striving in their behalf, as we do in our own, to promote increasing conformity to the law of God, and accompanying happiness;—thus, doing good unto all men, as we have opportunity, whether they are Greeks or Jews, Barbarians or Sythians, bond or free. When men contemplate this duty of love to their neighbor, briefly and imperfectly as it is here exhibited, and notice their own characters, they must be affected with deep convictions of sin. We are prone to regard our fellow man rather in the relations he sustains to ourselves and this world, than in those he sustains to God and the world to come. We do not strive to do him good, as a spiritual, immortal being, to the degree we should, if we possessed more of the spirit of Him, who died that we might live. We regard him too much as he affects our selfish in-

terests ;—too little as he affects the glory of God, and his own highest temporal and eternal welfare. Hence, we do not always rejoice in the success of the good, as we should do, through the dread that it may interfere with our own honor; and gnawing envy, and green-eyed jealousy are the offspring of our selfishness. We permit present degradation in the sight of man, to affect too much our thoughts, feelings, and acts, towards our fellow creatures, instead of regarding them in the light in which they are seen by the eye of Heaven: and country and color, become too much the boundaries of our sympathies. Though God has placed us in a world, where, in reference to the gospel, men are constrained, very often, to act on the principles of benevolence, in promoting their own selfish ends, and to do good thus becomes our truest policy; we are slow and unwilling to learn the lesson. We shut ourselves up in our own breasts, as the snail draws himself in his shell. We heed not, as we should, the groans of the oppressed and forsaken, and hide ourselves from our own flesh! Even when we go forth, sometimes, from self, and do some good to a suffering fellow creature, it may too often be done through the drawings of the providence of God, than the

promptings of our own benevolence. For myself, if the conviction of personal iniquity ever comes over my mind, with peculiar power, it is in contrasting the feelings and acts of benevolence, which reason and conscience tell me I should cherish and perform towards my fellow men, with those of selfishness of which I am, in too great a degree, the subject. May not the secret thoughts of others whisper the same language?—If then the preacher of righteousness presents the great duty of love to our neighbor, with clearness and force, he will convict men of sin, and reprove them for its practice. This was, substantially, the course, the prophet was directed to pursue, in the chapter of which the text is a part. He was to bring up before the house of Jacob their oppression. He was to tell them, that instead of keeping such a fast as God had chosen, they fasted for strife and debate, and smote with the fist of wickedness. He was to command them to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, to break every yoke:—to deal their bread to the hungry,—to bring the poor, that were cast out, to their house; when they saw the naked to cover him; and hide not themselves from their own flesh.

The law of God, then, is the great immutable rule, by which the Preacher is to condemn sin. It comprehends, in the first place, the ten commandments stating the specific forms of human duty. In the second, it presents love to God, as the only right motive to all obedience, whatever forms it may assume. And then, it requires love to our neighbor, as at once the result and concomitant of love to God. It appeals under this head, in some degree, to the reason and conscience of man, respecting all subordinate forms of human duty, not directly mentioned in the precepts of the decalogue: while it still presents these as the ultimate standard of appeal, to decide on the nature of our moral conduct.

I might here dwell, also, on the necessity of presenting the nature of the penalty of this law, to be inflicted on transgressors in a future world, and the evil effects sin against it produces in the present state of existence, as means of condemning iniquity. The former, indeed, its penalty, is termed by the great English commentator, the "main strength and force of a law." But the above illustrations are sufficient for our present purpose. I turn to the second, and at the present time, most interesting topic of discourse.

II. As the duty enjoined in the text suggests the standard by which it is to be done ;—so the contemplation of this standard, teaches the manner, in which the Preacher should perform the duty.

It is to be done, first, with vigor and boldness. He is to cry aloud, and spare not, and lift up his voice like a trumpet. And well may he do this, when it is considered whose law he promulgates ;—its perfect nature ;—the virtual pledge of the great Law-Giver to accompany and sustain him in its enforcement ;—and the wonderful adaptation of the whole course of providence to illustrate its principles,—bringing the blessedness of the obedient to light, and overwhelming the rebellious in the ruin and disgrace they have occasioned. It is no feebly conceived, and imperfectly expressed human statute the Preacher vindicates, in condemning men for sin. It is the word of the immutable, perfect God ;—suited by His wisdom, to the nature of things ; illustrated and enforced, alike by the dispensations of His providence, and the strivings of His Spirit. If it were a merely human device, or a theory of his own invention, its proclaimer might shrink from such a firm announcement of it. But, he speaks “not in the

words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." He speaks that word, which is as a fire, and as a hammer, breaking the flinty rock in pieces ;—which is quick, and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the joints and marrow, and of the soul and spirit, and is a discerner of the thought, and intents of the heart. Especially, may it be said, does this boldness become him, when he is called, as in the text, to reprove the iniquities of the professed people of God. Since no species of sin requires such energy, and moral courage, and mental power, for its exposure, as that which wearing the garb of piety,—relies on the form of godliness, without requiring its inward power,—and therefore feels wrong, and acts on professedly right principles.

While it is true, and never to be forgotten, that he, who ministers at the altar, is to declare the Divine law with unshrinking and uncompromising boldness; its nature also teaches him to declare it with all that long-suffering and humility produced by the conviction that it condemns himself.

It might be shown that he is urged to this course, primarily, by the character of God: Who, in all

our iniquity, has revealed Himself to us, in the very act of giving us His law, as, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty." He will by no means clear the guilty! He will not compromise the claims of His just and eternal statutes. And yet, so far as is consistent with their perfect maintenance, He will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He has, therefore, so loved the world, as to give His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

But, there is a consideration flowing directly from the nature of the Law of God, which deeply impresses on the Preacher long-suffering and humility in condemning sin. It is that every one has sinned; and that each one, in thus sinning, has, as often as he offended in one point, broken the whole law. So that however he may be inclined to esteem some, whom he beholds, to be sinners above all other sinners, he should not fail to reflect that except he repents, he shall likewise perish. While, therefore, the messenger of truth,

condemns iniquity, by whomsoever practised, as the abominable thing God's soul hateth, he should recollect that he has sinned against God, in times and ways innumerable; and that in doing so, he has acted on the same principles with the grossest transgressors, however he may hope that he differs from them, by the grace of God, in the degree of his guilt;—and however strong may be the words in which he condemns them. His severest terms of reprehension apply equally to himself. Were this truth heeded, and practiced on, as it should be, it would probably rebuke and repress much of that spirit, too rife at the present day, even among the people of God, which seems practically to affirm of whole classes of the community, guilty of certain transgressions, that they are sinners above all other sinners. Stand by yourselves, we are holier than ye! Sin, of every kind, should indeed be opposed and rebuked; but the manner in which it is done should reflect the example of Him, who was meek and lowly in heart! Like him, we should place ourselves by the side of the transgressor. We should reason with him on the enormity of his crimes; and from amidst the lightnings and thunders of Sinai, we should point him to the reflected glories of the

cross of Calvary! It may be truly said, that to be over-zealous, in uprooting any one external sin, may evince that the preacher is not deeply convinced of the exceeding evil of all sin; because too great an excitement at any one transgression evinces that he does not see clearly, and feel deeply, that one and the same wicked principle lies at the root of every single iniquity,—whether it be, comparatively, greater or less in the degree of its heinousness.

May I not add in the third place, that in reprov- ing iniquity, the preacher is carefully to confine himself to those acts, which clearly break the pre- cepts or principles of the Divine law,—and to these only? In order fully to explain myself here, it will be necessary to use familiar illustra- tions. I select, then, in the first place, the tem- perance cause. We say, and we say truly, that the use of ardent spirits, as an habitual drink, is mor- ally wrong. And we say this, because we think it can be shewn clearly, that such use of this liquid injures the body and the soul, and therefore, breaks the law by unfitting man for the duty of loving God with all his heart, and his neighbor as himself. Thus far we reprove this sin on correct grounds. We confine ourselves only to that act

of man, which clearly transgresses the principle of the Divine statutes. We condemn the use of ardent spirits, as an habitual drink. We do not condemn the act of drinking it, in all cases. We affirm the use of it, as a beverage, only, to be sinful. If it be taken, as it may be, in certain cases, as the best medicine which can be readily obtained, we do not condemn it. To use it, in such circumstances, would be a duty,—to abstain from it a sin. But, if we declared, without any limitation or reserve, that the act of drinking alcohol, from whatever motive, and under any circumstances, was a sin against God; we should go beyond the record of the Divine law, we should condemn the mere act of drinking, although done under the direction of a physician, to obtain health, and therefore for the glory of God, and the good of our neighbor. It is easy to see, that the same argument is applicable both to the manufacture and sale of this article. Before we condemn any act as sinful, we are to consider the probable motive by which it was prompted, the feelings with which it is done, and faithfully compare it with the precepts and principles of the Law of God. If we find it clearly contrary to this perfect stand-

ard, we are to pronounce its unqualified condemnation.

I have thus drawn out the argument in respect to one evil exciting much attention in our own day, but it is equally applicable to others. In my view, this is the principle to guide us in our condemnation of slavery. Whatever in that system is contrary to the precepts or principles of the Divine law, and we all know there is too much,* God forbid that I, or any one, should attempt, for a moment, to justify or palliate. Rather should we cry aloud, and spare not, and lift up our voice like a trumpet, and show His people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sin. But, here, let it be asked, what is it in slavery, which is sinful?—Is it, in all cases, the act itself of holding a slave? I think not. I think, that under circumstances which have existed, and may exist, a man may be held as a slave by man, for his own greatest temporal, and spiritual good; and that therefore, in condemning slavery, we should state

* I wish it to be distinctly understood that I am, and ever have been, opposed to the system of Southern slavery. Involving, as I believe it does, gross violation of the Divine law, I would wish to exert whatever of influence I could to effect its destruction. And for this reason, it appears to me peculiarly desirable that all measures in opposition to it should be founded on just principles.

the grounds of our condemnation of it, very fully and very fairly. Whenever man is held as a slave, for the sake of gain, or for any selfish purpose; whenever he is held, if you please to use the term, as property,* like goods and chattels, sin is committed. Because, then we do not, and cannot, regard him as an immortal accountable free-agent, under the government of God, and feel and act towards him accordingly. But, it does not follow, that in every case, when man is, or may be, held as a slave, these noble prerogatives are denied to him, and he necessarily held for the sake of gain, and treated as a good or chattel, destitute of an immortal soul. I may, under certain, and not impossible, or even improbable circumstances, buy a man with the desire of saving his soul, and making him a freedman of the Lord Jesus Christ. I only commit sin, when I fail to the extent of my ability, to perform those duties I owe to him, under the law of God, and the gospel which magnifies and makes it honorable. Whatever forms an impediment in the way of my faithful fulfilment of these duties, I am bound to remove, as soon as I possibly can. If my holding him as a slave is an impediment, I am

* I use the word property here as including the idea that man is held as a good, or chattel.

bound to liberate him immediately ; and if any circumstances exist, which would, in the eye of reason and conscience, enlightened by the word of God, render his immediate liberation a jeopardy to his best temporal and spiritual interests, I am bound to hold him still in the relation of slave. I should, in such a case, commit sin, in setting him free.

It is not necessary, in order to treat our fellow-men as property, in the sight of a Holy God, that we live in a community, in which a right to them, as property, is recognized by established law. If, in New England, I neglect to treat those who are in my service as possessors of immortal, accountable souls, and do not strive to do them good as I have opportunity ; but merely use their services to contribute to my own selfish happiness and convenience, I doubt not, that in the sight of God, I am just as truly treating them as property, as if they were conveyed to me, as goods and chattels, by the most indisputable legal titles of a slave-holding state ! And, on the same principles, though I might live in such a state, and hold a fellow-man as a slave under its laws, it does not follow, by any means, that I might not also, in the spirit of the gospel, be desirous of having those laws alter-

ed in whatever points they hindered the highest temporal and spiritual good of that slave; and might not, in the sight of God, and all holy beings, be doing all in my power to promote his greatest usefulness and happiness. In such a case, though a slave-holder, I should be promoting the cause of true freedom far more, than the inhabitant of a free state, who hired the services of his fellow-man, and exercised corresponding authority over him, merely for selfish convenience, without caring, as he should do, for the welfare of his immortal soul.

Many persons, if I mistake not, in condemning the act of holding a slave, under all supposable circumstances, will be seen to confound with such an act, as necessarily inherent in it, breaches of the moral law not essential to its nature. It is, indeed, on this hinge, in my own mind, that the whole question of slavery, as to first principles and corresponding measures, turns; and hence its great importance. To me, the Bible seems, in many places, to recognize the act as not necessarily sinful. The apostle Paul gives directions to regulate the mutual conduct of masters and servants who, there is the strongest evidence to believe,—were slaves. This he could not do, were

the act in all cases sinful, without temporizing with iniquity. Even the tenth commandment, already cited in a part of this discourse, says, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his man servant, nor his maid servant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's." It is unreasonable to believe, that a Jew, on reading these words, would not have concluded, that the terms man-servant, and maid-servant, referred as truly to those from among the heathen whom they held in perpetual bondage, by the command of God, as to any other kind of domestic help.

It has been already hinted, and therefore need be mentioned but briefly here, that the preacher himself is sedulously to guard against breaking the law, as he condemns others. He is not, in his zeal to reprove others guilty of certain iniquities, to bear false witness against them, by accusing them of crimes they have not committed, or attributing to them degrees of guilt not warranted by circumstances. He is not to indulge an unholy anger against his fellow-men. Neither in these forms, nor in any other, is he to prostrate, by his own act, the law he professes to vindicate, and thus expose himself to the rebuke of the apostle,

—“Thou that judgest another condemnest thou not thyself?” Recollecting that the principles of sin are the same in all transgressors, he should remember that when he upbraids others in opprobrious terms, with an unholy anger, he himself is then acting on these principles in the very act of reproof!

Finally: The messenger of truth is to strive, to the full extent of his power, to spread the knowledge and influence of the law to the utmost ends of the earth. The law is at once the beginning and the end of that gospel, the Redeemer commanded his disciples to go into all the world and preach to every creature. He lived and died to magnify and make it honorable. By it, is the knowledge of sin, and towards it, the eye of faith is ever directed as the high standard of its own attainments. Of course, then, the minister of the gospel is to spread abroad its practical influence to the utmost extent of his ability. The furtherance of this, he is to regard, primarily, in choosing his place of labor, either in a foreign or civilized land; and in the choice of his particular location in the one or the other. “How love I thy law” must be the practical exclamation of his life. His affection for this will increase as he submits to the power of the gos-

pel. In the spirit of true love to his neighbor, he is to spend and be spent to spread it, until the arm of every oppressor shall be broken, and the oppressed set free;—until Ethiopia shall stretch forth her hands unto God;—until the moral desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley;—until the liberty, wherewith Christ makes free, shall introduce every slave of tyranny or vice into the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

Nor is this an easy duty to the selfish heart of man. It is a warfare, to be waged against foes without, and within, until he passes the spiritual Jordan, and enters into the rest that remaineth to the people of God. He is to wrestle not only against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

This may serve to meet an objection that may possibly have arisen in your minds, as I have been illustrating this subject. It may have suggested itself to some, that the principles here assumed may indicate a desire to neutralize the power of the holy law of God, by virtually discouraging

those who would call gross sins by their proper names, and exhibit energy in opposing the wicked inclinations and practices of men. But God forbid that any one should attempt to do this. Nor do I think there is any tendency in what has been said, rightly understood, to produce such an effect. There is enough of opposition in the heart of man to the clear precepts and principles of the law of God, without arousing needless war against unjustifiable statements and measures, professedly, to promote its advancement, but really to hinder its progress. We should remember that one act prominent in the life of Christ was the imposition of restraint on the false zeal of His disciples. Even the beloved and amiable John was one of those who desired fire from Heaven to destroy the enemies of his Lord; and became a subject of the rebuke,—“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of!”—So shall we, whenever we go beyond what is written in the law, as we condemn sin. Perhaps, the highest kind of moral courage is that, which planting itself on principle, or waiting patiently and prayerfully to discover principles before it acts, bears meekly the language of rebuke or suspicion from censorious friends; as that, in human warfare, has been

called the true valor, “which knows, as well to retreat as to advance; which can conquer as well by delay, as by the rapidity of a march, or the impetuosity of an attack.”

III. Under the third and last topic of this discourse, namely, the motives for this duty;—it was my intention to urge its direct tendency to induce men, whether false professors of religion, or still impenitent, cordially to embrace the gospel, since this is the great end for which the minister of Christ speaks. But as this is, perhaps, sufficiently implied in what has been said, I shall close, by urging several reasons for the duty, more remotely but not less truly suited to produce this effect.

The first of these is, that it seems to be a necessary consequence of reproofing iniquity, on the principles we have stated, that the messenger of truth must meet the offender, as a fellow sinner, face to face. The first and most hopeful way of reproofing sin, indicated by the word of God, is by the lip of the living, present preacher. To cry aloud, and spare not, he must be present to the transgressor, and personally, and affectionately tell him of his iniquity. There is, if I mistake not,

great power in this habit of a personal address to transgressors. It seems to insure a degree of prudence and affection on the part of man towards man in the exposure of human iniquity, highly adapted, by the honesty and sympathy it necessarily awakens, to prepare the way for the presentation of the gospel, with the least possible degree of prejudice and opposition on the part of those to whom it is proclaimed.

But, whether this be admitted or not, it is quite certain, that the exposure of sin in the way considered, makes its exceeding evil appear principally in the fact, that it is committed against a holy God. It teaches that the greatest evil sin involves, is, that it dethrones Jehovah in the heart. Now, there is something in this near and realizing association of iniquity with God, (at once the Law-giver to condemn, and the Saviour to redeem from its curse, and the Sanctifier to purify from its pollution, and prepare for heaven,)—highly suited to mellow the manner of the reprovcr, and soften the heart of the reprovcd. Causing both to feel that they are alike sinners before God, it renders the one tender yet faithful, and the other suitably afraid. If any thing can make the preacher bold, and dissolve the sinner in penitential grief, it must

be this contemplation of God, as the Being, whom we should most grieve to have offended. To offend against man, the creature of His power, and the subject of His government, were a heinous iniquity; but this consideration sinks into comparative insignificance, as the soul exclaims,—“Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight!” Compared with my crimes against Thee, those against men are, as if they had never been! It is good thus to realize that God is the object, in whom our thoughts should terminate, as we mourn over sin in ourselves, or condemn it in others. This softens us, fills us with reverence, inspires us with humility, and produces in our souls a benevolent love, without permitting any sacrifice of principle.

Guided by these truths, let the preacher of the cross be firm and fearless in condemning iniquity, whenever, and by whomsoever committed, and he will have reason to feel confident it will induce men to embrace the gospel. Let him not draw back from this duty. Using the perfect law of God as a probe, let him search the moral disease of the transgressor to the very quick, and lead him wounded and bleeding, to the balm that is in Gilead, and to the physician who is there!

This faithfulness will also produce around him a pure church, and make the people of God, of whom he is the pastor, a peculiar people, zealous of good works. It will make them, so far as their influence can extend, as the salt of the earth, as the light of the world!

To these considerations, it may be added, that such boldness appears to be necessarily connected with purity of doctrinal belief. It has been well said, by Fuller, that all errors in religion may be traced, directly or indirectly, to wrong views of the Law of God. Accordingly, the great fundamental doctrines of the gospel,—depravity, regeneration, and atonement,—might be shown to be very intimately connected with the faithful maintenance of the precept and penalty of the law of God, and the free agency and accountability of man. On this account, boldness in exposing sin, on right principles, is adapted to prepare men for the gospel. It maintains the great truths of that gospel unimpaired. Especially is that exhibition of the law connected with right doctrines, which represents the principles of sin to be the same in all sinners. Whereas, mere moral preaching, by judging character too much by the performance or

neglect of some one external act, is apt to produce a pharisaic self-complacency, puffing up with pride all who perform the act, and censoriously condemning all who may neglect it,—without scrutinizing the principle on which each character is formed.

Another motive,—and the last but one I shall adduce,—for such faithfulness, is, that we have every reason to believe it will be accompanied by the influences of the Holy Spirit. Although God, in the bestowment of this influence is a sovereign, this does not exclude the idea of His regarding appropriate means. His sovereignty is harmonious with law, and it may be safely said, never contradicts its immutable principles, however inexplicable some of its proceedings may be to us, who are of yesterday, and know nothing. Accordingly, as it is affirmed in scripture, and verified in experience, that the great office of the Holy Spirit, in relation to sinful man, is to convince the world of sin, we have the best ground for concluding that He will most signally bless him, who most faithfully adheres to the principles of the law, by which is the knowledge of sin. An appeal to facts would probably fully sustain this position ; and it would be found that the most

faithful preachers of the law have been honored by the Spirit as the most successful heralds of the gospel.

I close by remarking, that boldness in reproofing sin, in a proper manner, is adapted to produce a genuine eloquence. Eloquence is the power of strongly affecting the minds of others with the thoughts and feelings experienced by ourselves. Sacred eloquence is the power of thus affecting men by religious truth. It would be vain, in this place, to attempt any minute analysis of it, but there are some things clearly essential to power of speech in the pulpit, which will be evidently seen to be connected with faithfulness in condemning sin. Among these may be named, a confident knowledge of the truths by which we would affect men, and an unshaken reliance on them, as comprehensive, far-reaching, and immutable principles. But, when can such knowledge and confidence so eminently exist, as when the preacher stands on the unshaken truths of God's eternal law? How ennobling to him must be the conviction, that while he speaks, he is guided by, and is enforcing a law, which binds all Heaven to the throne of God, and makes earth rejoice, and hell tremble!

When to this it is added, as I have attempted to show, that purity of doctrinal belief, in other forms, will be naturally united with such an enforcement of law, with what power must not a zealous expounder of it preach! We speak, and speak truly, of the great eloquence of the statesman, who intellectually possessed of the principles and spirit of constitutional law, rises in seasons of trying interest, and nobly asserts those great truths which guide a perplexed nation, in dark and stormy times;—standing, like a pilot, at the helm of state, when the boisterous billows of anarchy, or treason, or misrule threaten its destruction. But, a still nobler eloquence is his, who enforces amid a sinful people, the law of God, and who, even among its professed friends, detects inconsistent, or hypocritical iniquity. Such an one trusting in God, and humbly confiding in His truth, is not afraid to meet difficult moral questions on exciting subjects, nor will he, unlawfully and ignominiously avoid the responsibility of speaking his sentiments when they have been humbly, and prayerfully, but firmly formed. He will be righteous, and therefore bold as a lion. He will set his face, as a flint, against the workers of iniquity. He will set the Lord always before

him, and because He is on his right hand, he will not be moved.

At the same time, there will be joined with this firm conviction of truth, and this courage inspired by confidence in God, an unspeakable and benevolent mellowness of spirit, arising from the conviction that he himself is a transgressor. Remembering the rock from which he has been hewn, and the hole of the pit whence he has been digged, he will breathe forth the spirit of Him, who wept over Jerusalem, and who prayed for his murderers,—“Father forgive them, they know not what they do!” Or, of His apostle,—who warned men, night and day, with tears! No proud, self-righteous denunciations will fall from his lips. He will speak the truth in love!

Connected with this, there will also be in him, peace of conscience, arising from increasing obedience to the demands of law in his own heart and life. He will not, therefore, be afraid to look at men, while he condemns them. He will not seek to lessen the enormity of sin, or palliate it, in any way, because he himself is indulging in it. Nor will he, like Balaam, preach the truth by constraint. But, hating iniquity with an increasing hatred, he will strive with a continual struggle, to

expel it from his own heart, and the hearts of others. Hence, this duty of reproofing sin is itself a great safeguard against it, by committing us more thoroughly on the side of holiness. While, perhaps, it might be shown, that the condemnation of it on wrong principles only increases it in some other and plausible form in ourselves.

Besides these considerations, there seems to be such an adaptation of the law of God to the moral faculties of the human soul,—and its truths are so harmonious with the dispensations of providence,—that when its precepts and penalty are faithfully enforced, it so commends itself to the conscience and reason of man, as to arouse his attention, and awaken his emotions. This appears to be one reason of that deep silence, mute attention, and earnest gaze of a congregation, when a faithful preacher, clearly and firmly announces the truth of God. His theme makes him eloquent. It penetrates the deep recesses of the human heart. It is quick, powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. Sometimes it has been made a question whether the pulpit or the bar affords the most favorable field for eloquence. But, without wishing for a moment to disparage any other profession,—may it not be justly said that if

the preacher of the eternal Law of God magnified as it is by the gospel, be but imbued with the spirit of his theme, and of course ardently desirous to save the souls of his hearers, there is no spot where the noblest energies of eloquence can so exert themselves as in the pulpit?

In such ways will faithfulness in this duty contribute to the eloquence of a preacher. Firm in the persuasion that he declares the truth of God, and that God, is for him;—humbled, at the same time, under the conviction that he himself is a transgressor, and that by the grace of God, in Christ Jesus, he is what he is;—yet conscious that, through grace strengthening him, he is laying aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset him;—such a preacher must, according to the degree of his natural capacities, be “an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures.”

Such, my young brother, may you become. I have chosen the subject on which I have now spoken, not only with special reference to the times in which we live, and the place in which we are,—but also because I thought, it would be appropriate to your own situation, this day. I know not that you will fully agree with every position I have assumed; but the general truths enforced

will,—I doubt not, meet your cordial concurrence. Let me commend them to your conscience, and your heart.

You enter the pastoral office, at a highly important and animating time. Moral questions, of all kinds, are interesting the community, probably, to a far greater extent, than they have ever done before. The morality of the Bible, like the force of some mighty natural agent, is breaking up the dark foundations of error, and letting in, on all iniquity, the light of everlasting truth. It would seem that the battle of the great day of God Almighty, in the field of Armageddon, is commencing, to usher in after its departing turmoil, the Millennium of peace. Satan appears ready to assume, as one of his best devices, the form and garb, of an angel of light, that he may deceive, if possible, the very elect, and once more divide those, whom if united, he could not conquer. We should not be ignorant of his devices. Like the Savior, under His temptations, we should appeal to the truth. Every minister of the gospel, especially every Pastor of a church, should now direct and control his passions and his practice by faithfully studied, clearly perceived principles. He should pray and strive, that he may

not be unfaithful on the one hand, by deficiency in zeal and boldness, nor rash and inconsiderate, on the other, in an unscriptural censoriousness and anger.

The place in which you are henceforth to labor presents a strong motive to faithfulness. Here, amongst the graves of men, whose whole history affords the most striking illustrations of the blessedness and power of reproofing iniquity; and also of the mistake of turning aside from the clear principles of law, to dwell inordinately on subjects it does not, directly, affect; you are surrounded by considerations eminently suited to make you steadfast, unmovable, ever abounding in the work of the Lord. "Be thou faithful unto death!"
AMEN.



